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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2006

In Today's Papers

Early Election Debates Continue

Hurriyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak and others report several groups want an early election before the presidential elections in 2007, asking the main opposition CHP to walk out of parliament to force the AKP government into early polls. CHP, however, says that support coming from the nation and from opposition parties DYP and ANAP was needed for mass resignations in the parliament. It also wants the backing of the business world, media, and NGOs. State Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin said the opposition's aim is to force Prime Minister Erdogan to make an announcement about the presidential elections, making him declare whether or not he would run for president. "We are not going to fall for that," Sahin stressed. The extreme nationalist MHP chairman Devlet Bahceli expressed strong opposition to Erdogan's presidential aspirations, saying "One who berates people speaking in a coarse way, a horse trader, cannot become the president of the Republic." Bahceli added that if the new president was to be chosen from the existing parliament, his party would do all to review "all past mistakes, including concerning the office of the president," sending a warning to Erdogan that he will eventually be removed from office if he takes the top post.

Water Scarcity Curbs Industrial Production in Gebze

Sabah, Milliyet, and Radikal report that some 90 industrial plants in Gebze near Istanbul are suffering from a lack of water, forcing a stop to production. Workers will have to leave Turkey's most important industrial zone, Gebze, due to the shortage of water. Milliyet says Turkey's highest-per-capita-income city of Izmit faces a risk of endemic diseases, adding water prices have surged in the city. The shortage is due to the abnormally low level of water in the reservoir created by the Yuvalik Dam, built and operated near Izmit by the British Thames Water company. The former mayor of Izmit, Sefa Sirmen, said he was proud of the Yuvacik Dam, even though there is a court decision saying the state had incurred losses with its construction. Sirmen is currently a lawmaker from the main opposition CHP and immune from prosecution.

Turkey's Newest Party KADEP

Sabah, Vatan, Hurriyet and others: The country's 53rd political party was founded yesterday with the Participatory Democracy Party (KADEP) presenting its foundation application papers to the Interior Ministry. In a speech after presenting the petition, party leader Serafettin Elci said "KADEP is a participatory, libertarian, pluralist, secular and a democratic political party, loyal to people's rights and freedoms, and rule of law. The state order against a contemporary democratic approach and social structure should be changed. The most acceptable and equitable state model is a federal system. Only a federal system can find a reasonable and permanent solution to Turkey's fundamental problem - the Kurdish problem."

FM Gul Says Turkey will Continue Homework Despite EU's Suspension

All papers: Foreign Minister Gul announced his government's approach for the future of Turkey's troubled EU accession talks during a press conference at the Foreign Ministry. Criticizing the decision of EU members with carefully selected words, Gul said that the EU showed that it lacks a strategic perspective and took a decision which was in contradiction with the spirit, long history and multidimensional character of Turkish-EU relations. Asked whether Ankara will downgrade cooperation with the EU in strategic areas and energy issues, Gul ruled out such an option and stressed that despite lack of a strategic perspective on the EU side nowadays towards Turkey, Ankara still views its membership process as a strategic asset to both the EU and Turkey. Gul underlined that Turkey will never act in an emotional way, and will continue to behave with common sense.

Editorial Commentary on the Clashes in Palestine

ANKARA 00006709 002 OF 003

Mete Cubukcu comments in the leftist Birgun: "The main reason for the ongoing conflict between the two Palestinian groups is the lack of a leadership figure like Arafat. Palestinian organizations had similar disputes in the past but managed to reach consensus and unite because of Arafat's leadership qualities. Under the current circumstances and given the lack of popular leadership, Palestinians - the young generation in particular -- have lost their hope for the future. President Abbas is now offering early election as a solution to the conflict, but that will not succeed. Especially after his meeting with Tony Blair and Blair's support for early elections, President Abbas will not be able to be escape being labeled a man belonging to 'foreign powers.' Even if Al Fatah wins the new elections, existing problems will only be put off to an unknown period and differences will only be deepened. The Palestine issue requires a broader perspective for a true analysis. The current Palestine picture cannot be analyzed without considering the insincere policies of Arab regimes as well as the injustice and biased attitudes of the US and Israel."

Writing in the Islamist-intellectual daily Zaman, Abdulhamit Bilici observes: "It is such a pity to see the clashes between two Palestinian groups while the whole nation suffers severely under occupation. The drama of the Palestinian people is so heartbreaking that they even get sympathy from some Israelis. It just does not seem right that peoples of the same land with the same religion and the same race as well as sharing the same fate are holding guns on each other. The entire world is watching clashes between Palestinians instead of clashes between Palestinians and Israelis. Feeling despair from the clashes and economic problems, President Abbas has called for early elections as a solution. Whether it can bring a solution to the problem is one thing to debate. More importantly we cannot be sure whether elections can be held under the current circumstances."

TV Highlights

NTV (7 A.M.)

Domestic News

- Visiting Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili said he considered "the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline a guarantee of energy safety and stability in

the region," adding Georgia was also ready to help the construction of Kars-Javakheti (Ahilkelek)-Tbilisi-Baku railway.

- Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul discussed on the phone with Prime Minister Ismail Haniyah the developments in Palestine.

- Istanbul felt the tremors of an earthquake of 4.2 magnitude, its epicenter in the nearby province of Balikesir.

- Turkish journalist and author Ipek Calislar, tried on charges of insulting Ataturk in her book about his wife "Latife Hanim," was acquitted.

- On Tuesday, the London-based global credit rating agency Fitch affirmed Turkey's foreign currency and local currency Issuer Default ratings (IDR) at BB minus, and the country's outlook as positive.

International News

- EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn expressed hope to resume membership talks with Turkey in the first week of January.

- The Israeli Defense Minister Amir Peretz said Israel must take advantage of every opportunity for negotiations with Syria, calling on the government to hold an emergency meeting on the issue.

- A Libyan court has sentenced six Bulgarian health workers to death for deliberately infecting hundreds of children with the AIDS virus.

ANKARA 00006709 003 OF 003

- The Pentagon said in a report attacks in Iraq have risen sharply during the last three months, most of them against US troops.

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